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ABSTRACT

This report describes the progress of a school improvement initiative in New York City's vocational high schools. The New York City Board of Education contracted with Civic Strategies, a non-profit firm, to implement a vocational school improvement effort for 2 years. Civic Strategies' three-step model of school improvement involved: completion of school needs assessment and staff buy-in, development of school-specific improvement plans, and delivery of tailored professional development activities. The needs assessment highlighted such problems as too little collaboration between the academic and vocational areas, weak links with business and industry, and lack of time. In most schools, there was room for considerable growth in the management capacities of school building leaders and administrators. Data from site observations and interviews with school staff indicated that the Civic Strategies approach was thoughtful, well-founded, and well-implemented, given the conditions at the targeted schools and the very limited budget. Where buy-in was successful, Civic Strategies was able to roll out the rest of the model and make progress toward positive change. This occurred in about two-thirds of the schools. At the other one-third, implementation became stuck at the initial stages. (Contains 29 references.) (SM)

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Teaming Up for School Improvement in New York City: Civic Strategies, the Board of Education, Vocational High Schools, and Unions

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This report describes and analyzes the progress of an ambitious school improvement initiative in New York City's vocational high schools. In response to the need to implement new state-mandated higher academic standards for all students, the New York City Board of Education contracted with Civic Strategies, a Boston-based non-profit firm, to carry out a vocational school improvement effort for two years. In September 1998, Civic Strategies began implementing its three-step model of school improvement: school needs assessment and staff buy-in, development of school-specific improvement plans, and delivery of tailored professional development activities. This report is not so much a strict evaluation of the initiative as it is a description of the process by which Civic Strategies approaches whole-school improvement, with examples of some specific interventions and resulting changes. We review the effort from the starting date through the summer of 2000, with limited follow-up of activities through winter 2001.

Summary

In sum, we find that the Civic Strategies' school improvement approach was thoughtful and well-founded and, given the conditions at the targeted schools and the budget, well-implemented.

As we will describe, Civic Strategies' initial proposal for work was modified – once the amount of funding was set by the Board of Education, and again after initial school visits showed the variety and depth of their needs. While the impetus for the initiative came from a sense of urgency about new, state-mandated academic tests for all (including vocational) students, Civic Strategies' perspective is that interventions in curriculum and teaching do not progress far without first strengthening schools' management base. After spending some time in the targeted schools, Civic Strategies staff felt even more strongly that this perspective was correct, and with the agreement of central Board of Education staff, the development of leadership and management became the early priority.

While Civic Strategies' chosen focus can be debated (and indeed, there is a divide in the school improvement literature between those who emphasize working with school leadership and management and those who target classroom teachers), Civic Strategies has won enthusiastic supporters in New York City. We estimate that the approach has resulted in positive changes at two-thirds of the schools, while the model was not fully implemented in the other one-third of the schools for reasons we will discuss further below. According to their own records, Civic Strategies staff have delivered approximately 2,000 Professional Development Applications to the schools since beginning work in the fall of 1998.[1] Civic Strategies continues to work with four high school superintendencies.

Scope and Limitations of Report

This report is based on ten months of field research (November 1999 through August 2000) in New York City's vocational schools, the superintendents' offices, and central Board of Education and union offices; attendance at Civic Strategies staff meetings; and analysis of documents produced by Civic Strategies and the New York City Board of Education. Our research was not designed to be a traditional evaluation study that attempts to quantify progress on agreed-upon outcomes. Instead, we were asked to step back and assess the approach at the broadest level: the ways that it has been implemented in New York City, and the implications for further school reform efforts, both in the City and elsewhere. Thus we try here to give a sense of the *process*, as well as the progress, of the initiative, from the perspectives of the different participants.

Therefore, for example, while Civic Strategies' charge was to deliver services in 19[11] vocational high schools, we did not attempt to visit all of the schools. This was due in part to limited resources and to the fact that, when the research began in the fall of 1999, not all of the schools were yet fully engaged with Civic Strategies, because the schools were brought in to the initiative in three subsequent cohorts. More importantly, the idea was to obtain as much in-depth information about the approach as possible, and this led us to a methodology that focused more on a sub-set of schools.

We initially met with a selection of principals, focusing on those within the first assigned cohort of schools and others who had already reached a relatively high level of participation. After soliciting input from Civic Strategies and Board of Education staff, we then selected several schools and activities for in-depth research. Given the overall objectives of the study, it made more sense to use our resources to concentrate on those schools where Civic Strategies activities were most advanced. Thus, since we did not observe activities in all of the schools, general statements about progress in schools should be understood to be based upon a sample where the Civic Strategies approach appears to have taken hold the best. We will address in this report, to a limited degree, the issue of why the Civic Strategies approach seems to work well in some schools rather than others, but we have not been able to study the issue systematically; in our opinion, the topic is worthy of research in the future.

At the schools, we conducted one-on-one and group interviews of school staff. We observed services being delivered by Civic Strategies at schools and other locations. We also interviewed both current and former Board of Education officials, borough superintendents,[iii] and union officials. In addition to this we held numerous conversations with Civic Strategies staff and in general kept in close contact with them throughout the study, also attending many of their internal staff meetings. We did not speak with students nor did we observe any classes because, for the most part, the Civic Strategies approach was just beginning to impact pedagogy and curriculum in even the most advanced schools. In addition, while Civic Strategies sub-contracted with the New York Citywide School-to-Work Alliance to review the schools' current industry partnerships and make recommendations for creating and upgrading such partnerships, our study did not address that aspect of the project.

Finally, to protect the confidentiality of our respondents, no names are used in this report. Specific quotations are used to represent general impressions and points that were expressed by at least several respondents.

CONTEXT – THE CHANGING IMAGES AND EXPECTATIONS OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN THE 1980S AND 1990S

Summary: The New York City decision to engage Civic Strategies and the approach that Civic Strategies adopted can both be traced back to widely changing images of vocational education in the past two decades: images of the purpose of vocational education, the success that it was having, and the kinds of steps that are now judged necessary to "fix" it. In particular, the 1990s were marked by increasingly negative assessments of vocational education, and numerous proposed reforms, including a call for higher academic standards.

Changing National Perspectives on Vocational Education

Beginning with the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education), which argued that a weak education system was damaging U.S. productivity and competitiveness, the American public became increasingly concerned with the academic preparation of high school students. The changing nature of work away from mass production, and the rising wage premium associated with college education, led to a wave of education reform in the 1980s focusing on increased academic standards. For the most part, the education reformers saw secondary schooling as preparation for higher education rather than a career.

As a result, traditional vocational programs nationwide saw a significant decline in their enrollment numbers, as well as a drop in their prestige as an educational option. In its February 2000 study, *Vocational Education in the United States: Toward the Year 2000*, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that occupationally specific course taking and vocational specialization fell in the 1980s.[iv] Perhaps more indicative of the lack of prestige associated with vocational education is another U.S. Department of Education survey's finding that only a small shrinking minority of students considered themselves to be vocational students, regardless of their actual academic history; only 7.9

percent of high school students in 1990 called themselves "vocational," in contrast to 21 percent in 1980 (Mansnerus, 1994).

The NCES study found that vocational education students through the early 1990s were disproportionately members of special populations,[v] took a disproportionate number of remedial courses, and had relatively low grade point averages. Vocational education students also had lower math scores on the NAEP than non-vocational students (the causal direction of this relationship is unclear). Despite all of this, the NCES did find that the overall academic achievement of vocational students increased between 1982 and 1994, so that the percentage of vocational concentrators (those taking three or more courses in an occupational area) meeting the "New Basics" core academic standards outlined in *A Nation at Risk* reached the percentage of general graduates (non-college-bound, non-vocational) meeting the standards.[vi]

While student and parent interest in traditional vocational education was declining, new reports such as *America's Choice: High Skills or Low Wages!* (Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, 1990) and *What Work Requires of Schools: A SCANS report for America 2000* (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1991) continued the alarmism over the nation's economic position. Yet these reports had a different prescription; they called for teaching new skills that are neither traditionally academic nor vocational (see the list in the SCANS report) and emphasized new academic and vocational connections. Policy-makers began to turn their attention toward creating a new form of vocational education, and promoting a variety of innovative (and not so innovative) practices, such as apprenticeships, career academies, and Tech Prep.

National legislation gave increased financial backing to vocational preparation in the early 1990s. Congress re-authorized the Perkins Vocational Education and Training Act in 1990, and President Clinton signed the School-to-Work Opportunities Act in 1994. These Acts were intended to bring new federal dollars to support the re-structuring of vocational programs, and to encourage the integration of vocational and academic skills

in an attempt to make vocational education an appealing and viable option for the non-college-bound and college-bound alike.

Changing Images of Vocational Education in New York City

A review of the literature[vii] revealed surprisingly little about the state of vocational education in New York City in recent decades. This supports the assertion of many people interviewed for this report that vocational education had been "ignored" in New York City for some time. On the whole, however, generally positive reports in the mid-1980s give way to reports of violence and deterioration in the late 1980s and 1990s. The newspaper articles we reviewed tended to report on individual schools, and on noteworthy or extreme events (both positive and negative), so it is difficult to draw conclusions about the state of the entire system.

An *Education Week* article written in 1988 describes students "clamoring to get in" to the city's vocational schools; for the 1985-86 school year, 36,000 students applied for the 9,000 slots available. While state comptroller Edward Regan took this demand, and a study indicating the vocational schools had a lower drop-out rate than other schools, to indicate that the city should build more vocational schools, the Board of Education paid little heed (Walker, 1988). Other reports around this time (New York Times, 1988; Townsend, 1989) portray vocational students as hard-working and the teachers as dedicated. The articles describe how the students used their skills to create their own businesses, win grants for their schools, and prepare to enter highly skilled trades. They stress the need for trained workers and the high salaries that students with such skills can command. They also pay homage to the dedication of the teachers in vocational schools who forgo higher salaries in the private sector in order to teach future trades workers.

By late 1989, however, the reports became more negative. A student was killed at Alfred E. Smith High School in 1989 (Lee, 1989). In January 1991, George Westinghouse Vocational and Technical High School found that 151 of its 1,800 students had failed every single class the preceding semester (Olson, 1992). At Park West High School, the

18 kitchens intended to serve over 800 students in a world-class culinary arts program were virtually shut down – only 200 students and 5 teachers remained involved (Lambert, 1995). At Chelsea Vocational High School, which specialized in teaching electronics and technology, 1,173 students attended classes in a building that was still heated with coal and had a cafeteria that sat 139 people. Budget cuts put an end to a plan for renovations (Lambert, 1994). Two years later, the vocational system received more bad publicity when its planned "showcase" school, the High School for Cooperative Technical Education, failed to open on time due to building safety violations (Williams, 1996).[viii]

These articles, then, leave the reader without a sense of the overall system, or even that there was a comprehensive system. They give the sense of a group of schools with occasional success but that frequently are burdened with scant resources, little prestige and a troubled student population. In many ways it seems that New York City's vocational schools had quietly slid from view, possibly as academics and politicians focused on the problems of the non-selective comprehensive high schools, the promise of the new career magnet programs, and the successes of the City's elite schools. While it is also likely that the change in the city-wide high school admissions process beginning with the 1987 freshman had an effect on the vocational schools, from the available literature it is difficult to determine the nature of the effect.[ix]

The current image of vocational education in New York City remains bleak. For example, a recent *New York Times* front-page article described the current status of New York City's vocational high schools as "struggling to survive and rushing to reinvent themselves" (Kershaw, 2000). The article, however, focuses more on the former than the latter, and contrasts the glory days of the schools with a current sense of "peril." Some of the reason for the sense of peril comes from the national trends described above – the increasingly low-status nature of vocational programs and coursework, and the increasing importance of college in students' future plans (which seems to call for a college-preparatory curriculum).

Despite all of these factors, the primary catalyst in New York City for concerted efforts to promote change in the vocational schools has been the State's new academic requirements. Statewide English and four other subject-area exams, which in the past were taken by students desiring a higher-level Regents diploma, now must be passed by *all* students to graduate. It was this development that spurred New York City Board of Education officials to look more closely at the achievement of vocational students. Their comparison of vocational schools' Regents test-taking and test scores to those of the comprehensive schools found a large disparity. As one Board of Education official said in an interview for this report, the vocational students had been done an injustice – the city had been teaching trades and granting diplomas without requiring Regents standards, and suddenly, "Surprise! All students have to meet Regents standards." The new requirements also hold teachers responsible for teaching a curriculum that leads to a state-validated diploma, as indicated by their students' passing rates.

While the superintendents and principals interviewed tended to agree that all students *should* meet the standards in order to do away with two classes of students, several principals pointed out the large gap between the proficiency levels of their incoming freshman and the Regents requirements. One of them said that s/he[x] has numerous incoming students who can read only at a 5th or 6th grade level. As another principal aptly put it: "Yes, they need high standards, but you start with pre-K, so that by the time they get to high school, the kids have a fighting chance." Furthermore, since students in vocational programs take more credits in order to complete their occupational concentration, completing more stringent academic requirements in addition means that their high school years will be more arduous than that of non-vocational students. But regardless of the details, it seemed clear that New York City's vocational high schools (and their students) needed help in order to meet the new graduation standards.[xi]

New York City Looks for Help

For several years during the 1980s, a separate superintendent was designated for the New York City vocational schools. The loss of this position in 1990 meant the loss of an

advocate for these schools; there was no longer an individual in the school system solely dedicated to the vocational high schools. These schools were apportioned amongst the high school superintendents according to geography. When the new Regents requirements were instituted, the superintendents and their staffs were instructed to give attention to the problem of student achievement at the vocational schools. Yet it was eventually concluded that a centrally-coordinated effort was required, and that an outside group should be dedicated to the problem. In the summer of 1998, a Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued, entitled "Strategies for the systematic reform of occupational education in the NYC public schools." A one-year renewable contract was offered to an organization that could provide professional development services to 19 vocational high schools. According to the RFP: "Professional development is required so that school staffs at the vocational high schools succeed in the development of rigorous performance standards and in increasing the abilities of our students to achieve these standards" (p. 7).

It was clear from the RFP itself, and from those who initiated it, that this would be a challenging undertaking. The agenda was straightforward – raise the achievement of the students in the vocational schools. A high-level Board of Education official said that it was understood from the beginning that the schools would need serious restructuring to enable them to do so. Some individuals interviewed refer to this as the schools having to adjust to a new "dual system" of vocational *and* academic preparation for their students.

The RFP suggested a way to proceed: the organization selected should assess each school to determine its needs, and then develop and coordinate professional development activities organized around New York State standards, as well as the City Chancellor's Goals and Objectives. Several specific areas to work on were suggested: an emphasis on the 9th grade, the "unification of academic and vocational studies," "innovative instructional strategies," "thematic studies," project-based instruction, team teaching, and "the development of industry-enriched vocational high schools" that would include significant business involvement in work-based learning for students, teacher externships, and curriculum.

The Civic Strategies Response

According to Board of Education officials, Civic Strategies' proposal was "the most realistic," of the more than two dozen proposals that were received. Civic Strategies described the challenge as "building the capacity to change" in the schools themselves, rather than imposing change from the outside. Civic Strategies was awarded the contract and began work in September of 1998. Before describing the services delivered over the two years of the contract, we first describe in further detail the Civic Strategies' model of work as put forth in the proposal.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF THE CIVIC STRATEGIES SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT MODEL

Summary: The Civic Strategies school improvement model consists of three sensible steps that center on diagnosis and buy-in, development of school-specific improvement plans, and delivery of tailored professional development activities. The model is in line with much of the latest thinking in the education/school reform literature.

The model of work Civic Strategies put forth in the proposal consisted of three phases, or "modules": (a) a diagnosis and rapport-building phase, (b) the formulation of tailored "improvement models" that would have different components depending on the results of the first phase, and then (c) on-going delivery and follow-up by Civic Strategies staff. The implementation outline in the proposal called for the (originally) 19 schools to be divided into three clusters (6-6-7); the schools in each cluster would go through the modules at approximately the same time.

Civic Strategies contrasted its proposed services with those of other technical assistance providers by stating that it would not simply be providing a menu of services (e.g., different kinds of professional development workshops), but would first assist the schools

in determining and coming to a consensus about their particular needs. Once a direction was agreed upon, Civic Strategies would draw upon its staff's expertise and its connections to other experts in delivering and overseeing the services. Civic Strategies had previously used this model of work in other communities, and their experience had shown them the necessity of gaining a sense of rapport and partnership with the participants before interventions could be tailored and executed.

Module I: Buy-in Process and Capacity Analysis

In its proposal, Civic Strategies refers to the diagnosis of each school as a "capacity analysis." This was planned to be a series of one-on-one and group interviews in each school, covering the school staff's goals, strengths, problems, needs, and so on. The capacity analyses was designed to serve two distinct, but interrelated, purposes: learning enough about the schools in order to tailor the approach to the unique characteristics of each of them as well as initiating a crucial "getting to know you" process.

At the same time, Civic Strategies staff would meet with principals individually and in small groups. These ongoing meetings would also serve multiple purposes. First, they would provide an efficient vehicle to share information about the initiative to the principals. In addition, they would provide a good opportunity to start the relationship-building process between each of them and Civic Strategies staff. These meetings would also play a vital part in the school-specific research, in that they would provide an early opportunity for Civic Strategies staff to learn which principals would be the most receptive or the most resistant to change in general and to specific elements of the proposed process of change in particular. As noted in its proposal, Civic Strategies sees it as important to "be viewed as allies and resources to the principals" (p.11). Once completed, Civic Strategies staff would discuss the findings of the capacity analysis with each school's principal, and at that time gain a further sense of the principal's awareness and understanding of his or her school's challenges, and of possible barriers to addressing the challenges.

The Civic Strategies proposal recognized that real change would only be possible if principals, building administrators, and teachers first accepted the need to change. In accord with much literature on school change (Elmore, 1999; Little, 1995; McLaughlin and Talbert, 1990), Civic Strategies notes how important "school culture," or the values and beliefs of school staff regarding the purpose and practices of education and of teaching, would be to the process of change. According to this point of view, the vocational schools would have to achieve a common vision about student achievement in order for fundamental and lasting improvement to occur. In particular, as Civic Strategies and others who are involved in school reform see it, professional development, without necessary shifts in attitudes and beliefs, would not likely lead to sustained improvements in management and instruction and thus in better student outcomes. As Elmore (1999) states: "Organizations improve because they agree on what is worth achieving *and then* create processes that help their employees learn what they need to meet these goals" (p. 12, emphasis added).

In addition to the focus on schools' cultural conditions, the Civic Strategies approach stresses the importance of structural conditions over which administrators have control. Agreement on direction must be paired with an effective school management structure before instructional-level professional development can be successful. The proposal argued that a substantial time commitment needed to be made to analysis and upgrading of the role of the schools' leaders and administrators, as they likely need to alter their managerial patterns before they can effectively guide school-wide changes in support of instruction. School leaders and administrators need to learn to allow staff "the latitude, time, and confidence to try new things and take the necessary risks that are associated with authentic change" (p.5).

This core element of the Civic Strategies model is also supported by recent literature on educational change. Elmore has written that one of the main problems in schools is that supervision has become focused on administration, rather than on instruction. As he sees it, school leaders need to be re-focused on how they can support instruction, so that improvement can occur (1999). In surveys of teachers' opinions of their working

conditions, areas of critical concern often include administrators who are not supportive, and evaluation and supervision that is not helpful (Corcoran, 1990). Research has shown that the most effective schools are those in which principals create conditions that attract and hold good teachers (Corcoran, 1990). Time, space, resources, and authority are conditions that "supply the motivation, opportunity, and resources for professional learning and, in turn, for the redesign of schooling" (Little, 1995, p. 282-3). Teachers are able to work better in environments with strong and supportive instructional leadership and supervision, among other things (ibid.).

Thus attention to school leadership and management is an appropriate initial focus in a school improvement intervention, and the diagnosis and buy-in phase is crucial to getting the process off on the right foot and hence to the ultimate achievement of any positive outcomes.

Module II: Tailoring Services to Schools

The overall reforms that were called for by the New York City Board of Education, and envisioned by Civic Strategies, mirror (but are not limited to) the general thrust of reforms in vocational education nationwide: more rigorous academics, academic and vocational integration, and the use of outside resources, such as businesses, to modernize programs and make curriculum more relevant (Little, 1995). However, as Civic Strategies argued in their proposal, in keeping with the research on school reform (Desimone, 2000), the *specifics* of these reforms have to be developed through consensus with the individual schools, according to the capacity analysis results and the principal's priorities, not imposed from outside.

The previous module of work was expected to result in the creation, in each school, of a School Change Task Force group, which would ideally become "committed to the proposed course of action and ready to begin spreading the word throughout the school and community" (p. 13). Module two, then, would present "knowledge development and skill building planning sessions," in which approximately half of each school's staff

would participate. The proposal suggested 10 possible professional development sessions, such as "Why Educate Differently?", "Integrating Academics and Occupational Curriculum," and "Using Project-based Learning and Thematic Studies All the Time." Several sessions would be devoted to industry participation within the schools. These sessions were put forth only as possibilities; with the specific content to be based on research and tailored for each school. This plan of ongoing, connected professional development activities is also supported by research on urban high school restructuring (Little, 1995).

In order to improve communication across the schools, and between the schools and Civic Strategies, the proposal also called for monthly sessions with cohorts of principals, and similar monthly sessions with clusters of assistant principals that would enable them to learn new skills, share successes and problems with one another, and so on. These activities were to be designed to build the skill-sets of these groups of school leaders, who, according to research, would, in all likelihood, need assistance with their roles as managers and as instructional leaders (Elmore, 1999; Corcoran, 1990; Louis, 1990).

Module III: School-Site Follow-Through

The Civic Strategies proposal stated that each school would have a New York City-based "Cluster Facilitator/Advisor (CFA)," because "without regular, direct intervention on-site most professional development disappears without a trace" (p. 23). This individual, who would spend at least one-half a day each week on-site, would serve as a "coach" to the school staff, ensuring that they stayed on-task and completed agreed-upon objectives. "The CFA is almost an in-house professional development resource person to the school" (p. 17), and so the proposal budgeted for three such individuals, one for every cluster of schools. Civic Strategies also offered to provide the schools with "Issues Experts" – other professionals who could provide specialized information and technical assistance to the schools. By helping the schools to draw upon whatever expertise they might need, Civic Strategies would be able to deliver comprehensive support in ways that insured that the

changes that were being promoted would become an integral part of the school culture and standard operating procedures.

Adjustment of the Model According to Available Funding and School Readiness

It was not possible to implement the Civic Strategies school improvement model in the manner outlined in its proposal because the Board of Education was only able to fund the project at about half of the amount requested.[xii] A Board of Education official said that it was understood that the amount awarded, $500,000 a year,[xiii] would not be enough for significant work in 20 schools along the lines of the Civic Strategies proposal. Thus the budget reduction precluded full implementation of aspects of the model in all of the schools. In addition, it became clear early on that the frequent, staff-intensive activities proposed in Module II were too ambitious from a logistics point of view. Gaining release time for so many teachers at once was a significant hurdle. And, as Civic Strategies staff became familiar with the schools, it was felt that many of the schools would not be ready for professional development in curriculum and instruction in the first year, or perhaps even the second. So while the initiative and funding was framed in terms of a one- to two-year effort, Civic Strategies and Board of Education officials understood and agreed that significant improvement in the schools would likely take several years longer.

For these reasons, the proposal, in particular modules two and three, was implemented differently than it was written. The buy-in process, to no one's surprise, turned out to be a substantial challenge that took much of the two years' resources. The capacity analyses, as we will show, led the work to focus even more on the management, as opposed to instructional, level than initially envisioned. Thus while the proposal stated that approximately half of the schools' faculties would participate in professional development, and indeed, according to the literature, active teacher participation is crucial to a school change program (Desimone, 2000), at the end of the first two years the effort had not yet penetrated the schools to this extent.

The staffing plan was also implemented differently. From Civic Strategies' point of view, it was not the budget but the readiness (or lack thereof) of the schools that determined the staffing. During the first year of the project the school-site work was primarily conducted by three Boston-based staff, none of whom were working full-time on the project (Civic Strategies at the time had ongoing work in other locales). Additional staff were hired towards the end of the first year, when buy-in was occurring in a number of schools, meaning that an expansion of activities could proceed. Instead of 3 CFAs, Civic Strategies hired one central city-wide facilitator/advisor to serve as the project manager, working with all the schools to plan the specific professional development and support efforts delivered by himself, other Civic Strategies staff, and consultants; assess progress; and work with school-based leadership to modify school improvement efforts in light of accumulated experience. As we will discuss further below, we heard from many of those involved in the initiative that Civic Strategies' staff were spread too thin; however, from the point of view of Civic Strategies' president, the level of staffing matched the level of readiness and engagement of the schools, and staffing was adjusted according to the project's flow and progress.

BUY-IN PROCESS AND CAPACITY ANALYSIS

Summary: The first phase of the project, gaining buy-in from the principals and other faculty, and conducting the school-specific needs assessments, was relatively successful in that the majority of the principals came to support the initiative and momentum for change was created in many of the schools.

Principals' meetings and cohort retreats

Civic Strategies' proposal emphasized that change in the schools would not occur unless the school principals came to see them as partners and allies. Thus a great deal of time was spent on the process of bringing the initiative to the principals and explaining to them that their full participation would be critical to any outcomes. Once Civic Strategies

was chosen, a meeting was held to introduce Civic Strategies' president to the 20 principals. According to several of them, they were told by Board of Education officials that consultants had been hired to help them re-structure their schools; they had no choice in the matter. Not surprisingly, this news was not received equally well. The message was clear and many accepted it: "a new mission had been imposed" on vocational high schools and they and their programs needed upgrading.

Yet the tone in which the message was delivered by Board officials was considered offensive by some: One principal said that they were made to feel "worthless" in that their schools were performing poorly and they weren't capable of improving on their own. Another said, "We were *told* that *we didn't get it*, we needed help, and that help was going to be Civic Strategies." To some principals Civic Strategies' role was clear from this initial meeting: Civic Strategies would help them raise standards so that their students would pass Regents examinations. One principal said, "If someone offered to help, why would I say no?" However, according to Civic Strategies staff, their message was actually that they would assist the principals in creating the conditions that would enable improved instruction and Regents passing rates. This slight difference in perception of mission brought about some confusion during the first two years.

A great deal of time and discussion went into planning every step of this early stage of the initiative. Together, Civic Strategies staff and Board of Education officials divided the schools into three cohorts. Stronger schools and principals were chosen for the first cohort, in the hope that these schools could "make a big splash," show improvement rapidly, and serve as models for the rest. Meetings with the principals of the first six schools, Civic Strategies, and Board of Education officials followed, the purpose of which was to plan the agenda for a kick-off overnight retreat. High-level union representatives also participated in the planning and implementation of the retreats and were supportive of the process. The principals were to bring a group that represented the different power bases of their schools (APs, union leaders, others whom teachers regularly listen to) who could return to the schools and influence others.

From this early stage, Civic Strategies used a tactic they would continue throughout the initiative: guiding school personnel to take an active role. The principals had basic questions such as how many people they should bring. Civic Strategies staff replied, "How many people do you think you would need?" This unexpected turn would have principals in the position of having to make decisions themselves that would affect the future of the project. In this way, Civic Strategies helped the principals understand their roles as leaders in the process. Civic Strategies also made clear to the principals that their teams would be looking to them for signs of how to respond. In the end, some principals chose to bring their skeptics, while others thought it best to leave potential naysayers behind.

The retreats included presentations on SCANS, standards, and labor market statistics, all important and relevant areas for vocational school personnel. According to one person who participated in the planning of the retreats, they were to get school staff "to focus and create a game plan based on reality but also with some vision of how to do business differently, because it has to be done differently." Thus, over a day and a half, participants were led through a process of 1) a "reality check" in terms of how the schools were meeting neither academic standards nor the needs of businesses for well-prepared employees; 2) thinking in terms of what their schools would need to improve, and 3) understanding that Civic Strategies was hired to help them change – and not simply induce change from the outside. Another Civic Strategies staff member said that the purpose was to bring about "a creative and healthy tension." Civic Strategies wanted the schools to look at themselves with a critical eye and see the necessity for change, and then accept that Civic Strategies would support them in changing; this would begin the rapport-building process between them.

As was designed, the process evoked a series of responses from the participants. They were first given the opportunity to vent, complain, and express their resistance to change. Despite the focus on what officials thought would be the "more workable" schools, some were vocal in arguing for the status quo. One participant described the scene as "intense." While at the two next retreats the remaining cohorts resisted somewhat less, some

participants still directly challenged Civic Strategies staff. One school "mutinied" – staff were rude, disruptive, and their principal didn't, or couldn't, control them. These individuals argued that "Our job is to get our kids jobs; we can do that, so why do we have to change?" The counter-argument was that the new standards must be met. One principal said later that the resistance probably derived from the views of many of the participants that their students cannot reach higher academic standards.

Some skepticism was simply due to the fact that the initiative was being imposed by the Board of Education. As will be illustrated further in this report, there is little trust or respect between some of the school-based employees and the central administrators to whom they report. Participants said that Civic Strategies took this context into account with a very effective "seductive" approach, communicating to the schools the following: "We don't need this work, we're only here because this is a challenge. We can help you. We've done this before. You don't have to be afraid because everything is confidential, we won't tell tales and we won't tell the Board. But, you can tell us what you need, and we will take it back to them and make your case to them."

Several principals also spoke of skepticism born of the many ineffective one-shot professional development efforts they had previously experienced. During the retreats, however, participants began to recognize that this "was not the typical Board of Education training. It was professional, not a waste of time." In general, as the participants began to understand the initiative and Civic Strategies' role in it, some of the skepticism began to dissipate and participants became more positive. Those we spoke with who attended the first retreat generally said that by the end, people left feeling convinced of the necessity for change, and understanding Civic Strategies' role as "change experts." A principal from the third cohort said of his/her retreat that "It really got us going" so that her staff returned to the school "energized." The schools started to understand that they would have to take responsibility for changing, but that Civic Strategies would be providing continuing assistance and support.

One outcome of the retreats was that each school identified two to three professional development priorities for their school. Those participating from each school were to return to their schools and further elaborate which particular issues to focus on. Civic Strategies staff held follow-up conversations with the school principals in order to gain agreement about next steps.

Capacity Analyses

After each retreat, Civics Strategies staff made appointments with the schools to conduct the capacity analyses, or needs assessments. As the two different terms suggest, the goal was both to examine what resources and capabilities the schools already possessed, and to uncover what all the different groups in the schools – administration, teachers, staff, and students – felt to be the most pressing needs. This part of the initiative, in addition to reviewing available data for each school, served as the research that would help to determine the needs to be addressed in the particular schools.

Principals were asked to schedule a day of one-on-one and small group interviews with Civic Strategies staff. Having principals select the participants was a good tactic because principals couldn't later repudiate the findings by saying that Civic Strategies hadn't spoken with the "right" people. On the other hand, there was a danger that principals might direct Civic Strategies towards certain individuals and away from others. In our opinion, it was correct to involve principals in the decision-making process from the beginning of the initiative. Civic Strategies' point of view was that, whomever they spoke with, the issues crucial to the school would be revealed.

Civic Strategies spoke with 40 to 60 people in each school. All of the participants were assured that specific comments would not be attributed to particular individuals; Civic Strategies would only share general findings. To examine capacity, Civic Strategies asked the participants general open-ended questions such as "What works well in your school?" To uncover needs, participants were asked, "What doesn't work?" and "What changes would you like to see?" Teachers were asked, "If you were the principal, what

would you do?" More specific questions were asked about, for example, curriculum, integration between academic and vocational subjects, and links with local industry.

For the most part, these assessments went smoothly; however, some days of interviews were less well-organized by the principals, which was an early indication of their leadership and management style and of how seriously they were taking this process. Some participants expressed anger and challenged the initiative. Others were interested and willing to see where it would go. Civic Strategies staff hoped that participants would begin to believe that their opinions and suggestions would be valuable.

Civic Strategies summarized the findings from each school and presented the information to each principal at a one-on-one meeting. As introduction, Civic Strategies staff again explained the goals of the initiative as a whole, and assured the principals that all the schools in the initiative were undergoing these assessments. After reviewing the findings, Civic Strategies staff would ask, "Did we get this right? We have no particular opinion of your school, this is just what we've heard, and we hope that you're interested in moving forward." Then, the objective was to review the professional development areas targeted at the retreats for attention in the context of the capacity analysis findings. Civic Strategies' objective was to come away from these meetings with specific, agreed-upon areas on which to begin work.

There were a variety of responses from the principals. One said that while he didn't think Civic Strategies could learn very much in one day of interviews, "their perceptions were remarkable" and "right on the money." Thus he wasn't threatened by their findings or their later suggestions. Another principal said that the findings held no surprises but only verified problems of which she was already aware; this made her ready "to jump right in." By contrast, one principal called the capacity analysis a "whistle-stop school evaluation visit" and said that "If they're going to come away from that surface analysis and draw deep conclusions from it, that's wrong." His perception was that the findings reflected whatever the participants were concerned with that particular day or week. Some principals reacted with anger, or with tears.

Some teachers complained of negative ramifications from the process. One said that in the relating of the information to her principal, "everything was misconstrued, it was very unproductive." A teacher from a different school said that her principal doesn't know "what is really going on" at the school and so was surprised by the findings. As a result, the principal thinks the teachers "are a bunch of malcontents." One principal confronted some of his staff after being told of the findings. The issue of confidentiality is tricky, particularly in the case of these schools that likely already felt under attack and did not welcome outsiders evaluating them. Some individuals in the superintendencies also challenged the confidentiality of the process, arguing that they had the right to any and all information on their schools. Civic Strategies counter-argued that sharing specific information with the superintendents or central Board of Education staff would not help them build the relationships of trust with the schools that would be necessary to carry out the work ahead. Confirming this point of view, one principal told us that she could be honest with Civic Strategies staff because "They do not air our dirty laundry to the superintendent." It is hard to imagine the Civic Strategies process working without an unambiguous offer of confidentiality.

Capacity Analyses Findings[xiv]

In general, Civic Strategies found that in the first cohort of schools, there was little collaboration between the academic and vocational areas, there were weak links with business and industry, and these and other shortcomings were related to structural barriers such as a lack of available time. In particular, teachers frequently spoke about the lack of common planning time, which is a pre-requisite to learning about and implementing new, integrated curricula and instructional practices. In some schools, teacher conference days had been reduced or eliminated entirely. The vocational and academic sides of the schools "rarely talked" and in the rush towards Regents exam preparation, block scheduling and other changes in academic programming were often viewed as infringing upon the time for vocational subjects. In addition, some of the

schools did not understand the importance of strong industry connections and industry certification of their programs. All of these problems were deeper than anticipated.

The most common finding was that there was room for considerable growth in the management capacities of the school building leaders and administrators. In particular, those responsible for day-to-day management, the assistant principals, were rarely functioning as the middle managers they were supposed to be. While most of the educators needed new and better skills, the APs all too often were the least able to carry out their functions. The management structure of New York City high schools is unique, in that APs serve as both department heads (instructional leaders) and as middle managers. But many were unclear of their role, or overwhelmed by it.

Civic Strategies went to central officials and to the superintendents with this finding and the recommendation that the emphasis of the work in the near future be on leadership and management development. Union officials were also briefed. Most agreed with Civic Strategies' assessments and recommendation. In a later interview, one superintendent said that he understood that working with the principals and the APs would be a means to an ends – building the capacity of the leadership of the schools. Teachers' involvement, and work on instruction, would have to come later. There was initial resistance from some superintendents, however, who were more inclined to blame teachers for the schools' problems, possibly because the failures of the teachers do not reflect as poorly upon the superintendents as do the failures of the supervisors.

Thus the capacity analyses determined the general direction of the work: the educators, including building managers, would have to be helped before the students could be. One Civic Strategies staff member likes to use an airplane metaphor to make this point: "It's like they say on the plane, you have to put the oxygen mask on yourself before you can put in on your kids. You have to help yourself before you can help your kids." In other words, the process had to begin with Civic Strategies helping the leadership of the schools improve the schools culturally and structurally: The leadership would have to put into place a new, common belief system so that teachers would no longer say that they

could do better "if only we had better kids." And the administration would have to learn better management practices so that the teachers would be better supported in instruction. In order for the students to perform better, the adults would have to perform better.

The decision to emphasize management, however, did not exclude the need to address curriculum or classroom-based challenges. Therefore, the planned assistance to the schools was grouped under three main headings: 1) management and leadership, which would include principal and AP support, and cabinet capacity-building; 2) curriculum enhancement and integration, which would include curriculum review, training in curriculum integration strategies, as well as the alignment of the schools' curricula with their required annual Comprehensive Education Plans; and 3) "other," encompassing such school-specific issues as external constituency building, working with guidance departments, or other projects requested by the principals.

Moreover, as Civic Strategies staff became more familiar with the schools and their personnel, they learned that in some cases they would only be able to approach the management and leadership issues by way of more concrete program or curriculum work. How they proceeded depended largely on the extent of buy-in to the initiative by the principals and APs of the schools.

Buy-In

One of the first challenges was to gain principal buy-in for the Civic Strategies model. The model presupposed that "outside organizations cannot force anyone to do things they are not ready or willing to work on" (CS Workplan, 11/98), so establishing agreement and momentum with the principals was of the utmost importance. Civic Strategies also needed assurance that the principals would support the effort materially, in providing per session (extra paid hours) for teachers, substitute teachers to fill in for teachers engaged in professional development or other Civic Strategies-sponsored activities, changes in scheduling, and so on.

As one would expect, the speed and ease of the buy-in process varied greatly. From their experiences at the school retreats, and their knowledge of the organizational development literature, Civic Strategies expected to face some hostility and resistance. In particular, there was a great deal of skepticism by many of the principals and their staffs, who had seen many ambitious new initiatives come and go. One principal explained that the New York City Board of Education constantly brings in new people who tell the teachers that they're going to help them perform better; then they leave. Another said that the schools are accustomed to "drive-by professional development." There was also a lot of mistrust; participants wondered what these outsiders could possibly know about New York City vocational education, and they wanted to know what Civic Strategies' agenda really was. But Civic Strategies staff consistently told the principals that "This is not our project, it's *yours*." Civic Strategies staff used their out-of-town status to drive home the point that they had no agenda other than assisting the schools to operate better.

Through one-on-one conversations, formal and informal group meetings, and structured professional development activities, Civic Strategies eventually won over the majority of the principals. In addition, Civic Strategies gained the valuable support of officials from the teachers' and supervisors' unions, as well as that of several superintendents who became closely engaged in the project. These individuals also went through a process of buy-in. The hiring of Civic Strategies could be seen as implying that the superintendents had been neglecting the schools; as one superintendent said, "It means we're not supporting or working with our schools enough." Yet Civic Strategies and central officials made a conscious decision to closely involve the deputy superintendents, and as communication about the initiative increased, some superintendents saw how their and Civic Strategies' efforts could reinforce each other.

MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

Summary: Professional development activities with principals and assistant principals have already yielded positive, identifiable changes in communications and management

practices at many of the schools. Overall, the Principals and APs who participated have found the work with Civic Strategies to be valuable. They state that they and their colleagues now have clearer understandings of their responsibilities and are working better as teams. Much of this work is still in progress.

Principal Management and Leadership

As already discussed, the research literature and the administrators interviewed for this report support Civic Strategies' initial focus on the leadership of the school as a way to move towards improvement of student achievement. As one superintendent said, "Part of making a better school for kids is making it a better school for teachers," and this is the responsibility of the principal. "Just shouting at teachers won't do it"; good principals know how to get their teachers to work with them. If the principal can change the teachers, he or she can change the student outcomes.

Work with Individual Principals

One-on-one work with the principals generally focused on two general areas: effective day-to-day management, and effective long-term management. The first area covered, for example, the ability to delegate, the ability to empower and work with the cabinet, improved interpersonal skills, and improvement management of time. Long-term management included attention to instructional and pedagogic leadership, and strategic planning, which included specifying the mission and goals for the school, and then setting benchmarks towards them. To improve their short- and long-term management skills, the principals needed a clearer sense of their job description, so that they could delegate tangential activities elsewhere, and focus their time appropriately.

Example

> *At one school, communication between the principal and the staff had entirely broken down. The staff complained that the principal did not know how to treat people with respect, that s/he yelled and dictated. The situation came to a crisis point when the principal tried to impose block scheduling. School staff said that this was yet another sign that s/he*

needed to learn how to lead in such a way as to gain the staff's support. The principal acknowledged that s/he needed help.

In discussions between the principal and the school's union chapter leader, a school improvement task force group was formed, with the understanding that someone from outside of the school would facilitate the group. This was an appropriate opening for Civic Strategies. A Civic Strategies staff person began to facilitate regular meetings of the group, which consisted of 5 to 6 individuals elected by the different constituencies of the school, while also meeting one-on-one with the principal to plan the meetings beforehand and then to analyze and process them afterwards.

By leading the first several meetings, Civic Strategies staff modeled good facilitator behavior. Civic Strategies coached the principal on many aspects of running productive meetings, such as having an agenda, listening to the participants, keeping things moving, creating an action plan, delegating follow-up, and setting a date for the next meeting. The principal learned to ask for and really listen to others' concerns and ideas. After the block scheduling crisis was resolved (with a building-wide vote), the task force moved on to other issues. At one meeting, where Civic Strategies staff were not present, they addressed the overarching problem of communication. The principal practiced his/her newly-learned skills. S/he gave the group five minutes to write down their thoughts, after which they began to express them verbally. The participants were honest; they told the principal that s/he needed to include others in decision-making, and that s/he needed to give out timely, correct information. Specific building issues were addressed, all of which the principal noted on a flip chart. The principal said s/he would discuss each with the Civic Strategies facilitator, and then at the next meeting proceed.

While this school's problems run very deep, these meetings represented a good start towards mending the relationships between the principal and the school staff. The principal said that months had gone by with one teacher (now on the task force) refusing to speak to him/her; the two could now have a comfortable conversation. The modeling and coaching done by Civic Strategies showed the principal a new, more effective way of behaving. The participants without exception said that they liked the Civic Strategies staff person and felt that s/he was helping; the presence of Civic Strategies keeps the group on task so that they actually accomplish things. However, they did also say that the principal was on his/her best behavior when Civic Strategies was present, so that the principal's transformation was not yet complete. Real, lasting change would require more time.

This is only one example of how Civic Strategies assisted individual principals. But it is typical. With others, Civic Strategies helps them to define their vision for their schools,

and create benchmarks toward achieving it. For some of the principals, Civic Strategies staff became trusted advisors and colleagues, serving as support and sounding boards through regular meetings and telephone conversations.

Principal Group Work

Originally, Civic Strategies proposed to host monthly principals' roundtables, to help the principals work more closely with one another and learn from one another. However, Civic Strategies staff soon found that the schools, and the experiences of the principals, were too diverse for citywide sessions to be a valuable use of time. Thus, rather than imposing their early assumptions and plan on the principals, Civic Strategies staff devised other, more useful ways for subsets of the principals to collaborate. A vocational education task force group (that includes a superintendent and union representation as well as selected principals) has met regularly, addressing issues such as recruitment from the middle schools, and best practices among the vocational schools. A particularly successful collaboration was developed among the four participating Bronx principals. These four regularly share ideas, strategies, and resources. While they already shared good rapport before Civic Strategies was hired, Civic Strategies provided a structured way for them to meet and collaborate, thereby solidifying their relationships and creating a context in which they could help one other with mutual and school-specific challenges.

Assistant Principal and Cabinet Development

In New York City, an Assistant Principal (AP) is a department head. High schools normally have eight to twelve assistant principals: one for each subject department (usually humanities, which includes English and social studies; math; science; and vocational as a whole or in subject areas such as automotive or business), and an AP operations (APO), AP security (APS), AP special education (APSpEd), AP physical education, AP pupil and personnel services (APPS), and AP guidance. These assistant principals constitute the principal's cabinet. This configuration is different from schools in many other communities, in which assistant principals and department heads are typically two different positions.

In some schools, the decision to work with the cabinet was made early on; in others, Civic Strategies staff observed cabinet meetings (the APs and the principal) to see how well the team functioned. In one school Civic Strategies staff spent an entire day shadowing the different APs. Through this kind of assessment and later observations, Civic Strategies concluded that the role of AP has changed over the years to encompass more leadership and managerial responsibilities, but many APs still think of their primary role as observing and evaluating the teachers in their departments. Moreover, the professional development of APs to take on these new roles and responsibilities has generally been inadequate if not non-existent.

A union representative confirmed this point of view, but said that in the current union contract for those APs who become year-round employees, there is no mandatory annual amount of professional development specified. This individual also told us that, while the new contract increased supervisory salaries significantly, many teachers no longer aspire to become supervisors because of the amount of work involved. As well as being instructional leaders, APs have a great deal of paperwork; they deliver or contribute to budgets, comprehensive education plans, guidance plans, safety plans, and so on, all of which require meetings and consultations. New burdens are imposed all the time. For example, the NYC transit system recently instituted Metrocards, which necessitated changes in the procedures by which students are supplied with free public transportation. Instead of hiring an outside agency to implement the changes, the responsibility was given to school-site staff. As another example, schools now must have recycling plans, a task that principals tend to delegate to their APO. Many believe that schools are continually being asked to do more with fewer and fewer resources.

Thus the role of AP, individually and as part of a team, has become more important. Yet Civic Strategies found that the vocational high schools' APs typically had role confusion and low morale, and little understanding of how their work fit in with the work of those above and below them in the school and the school system. APs were not viewing themselves, nor were they functioning, as a management team. Some principals and

superintendents also needed help in guiding and supporting the APs. As one Civic Strategies staff member said, the APs "work on their own little islands," while they need to link their day-to-day activities with the goals for the entire school. As made clear by a Board of Education visual showing a typical school's organizational chart (including outside constituencies), the reality is that "all roads lead to APs."

To make matters more complex, Civic Strategies found that no two cabinets looked alike; their dynamics and their needs varied. Some APs worked relatively well with one another but had conflicts with their principal, while in other schools the opposite was true. Some cabinets met irregularly and only so that the principal could disseminate information (and often directives) from the superintendent or central administration. In most cases, cabinet meetings were not being used to set goals and assign accountability for follow-through and meeting the goals. In fact, many meetings had no set agendas at all, or agendas unrealistically listed 20 or more items. Participants did not have appointment books so that they could schedule further activities. The common issue was that the APs and the principals all felt overwhelmed with work.

Thus once again, as with the principals, it was clear that tailoring assistance to the specific schools would be crucial. Civic Strategies staff developed city-wide as well as school-specific goals to address these problems. They saw the necessity for the APs individually to understand better their own roles and responsibilities as their school's middle managers, as well as those of their colleagues. Only then could they start to work as a unified team towards the vision and mission of their school, as developed by themselves in concert with the principal and the Chancellor's and superintendent's goals. Civic Strategies also saw that the APs needed to better learn the role of their principal, and their supportive role toward him or her. Over time, this became a shared joke in some of the schools: Civic Strategies staff would ask the APs, "What does AP mean?" And they would call out in unison, "Not assistant principal, but assistant *to* the principal!"

Civic Strategies has worked with the cabinets in a concerted fashion in approximately one-third of the schools. In most cases, the work started with meetings of the cabinets

without the principal, simultaneous with individual coaching of the principal regarding his or her role with and needs of the cabinet. Much time in the initial meetings was spent on the APs venting their complaints and frustrations. This was not wasted time because it was good information for Civic Strategies staff to have, and, Civic Strategies realized, the APs sorely needed the outlet, to be able to get to the point of addressing their problems. One of the main complaints was that the APs do not have enough time to accomplish all of their work. This represented a challenge for Civic Strategies staff, in that they had to convince the APs that the time spent with them would be well-invested. It was also important that the principal support Civic Strategies' work with the cabinet and give the message that it would help them to perform their jobs better.

School Goals and Quarterly AP Goals

In this activity, Civic Strategies assists APs in coming to agreement regarding long- and short-term goals for their school. For example, at one school, the Civic Strategies facilitator first had each cabinet member identify his or her goals for the school during a group AP meeting. The Civic Strategies staff person then presented the superintendent's five goals and the chancellor's initiatives, and created a chart showing all the different points of view. One AP described this exercise as helping them "to take a global view of the school that is focused on student needs." The next step in the process was lining up the global goals and objectives with the principal's vision and mission, and then documenting action steps towards the goals in the school's Comprehensive Education Plan.

The Civic Strategies facilitator also helped APs set quarterly goals and delegate responsibility for follow-up and meeting the goals. For example, one school had recently instituted a new dress code, and a goal was set to re-visit the policy, determine its effect, and decide whether to continue or modify it. As another example, a schedule was created for the classroom observations APs are responsible for, so that they would be completed on time.

AP Roles and Responsibilities

Before APs can carry out their role effectively, and work with one another, they need to first understand their own role and those of their colleagues. Civic Strategies developed a series of sessions to work towards this goal. First, the APs list the critical components of their roles, and then they look at replication and connections amongst themselves. This exercise starts with the facilitator asking each AP to "articulate your role." S/he explains that the exercise will be helpful for them all, to understand more deeply what each is responsible for.

Example

In one school the AP/guidance described his role in this way: meeting the social, emotional, physical, and academic needs of students. The facilitator prompted him, asking, What do you do for the guidance counselors? Do you manage them? Oh yes, he replied that he does manage the counselors. He is also responsible for student activities, attendance, and records; junior high school articulation; and relationships with community-based organizations. Through these discussions, the importance of training was seen over and over again. One AP lamented that he had been designated coordinator of testing, but not trained for this responsibility. If he does not do a good job, he fears he will be blamed.

When all had described their roles, the facilitator said that nobody haa mentioned one in particular: their role towards the principal. They could not work without the principal; they have to report to someone as they do not report to one another. The facilitator pointed out that APs have a connection upwards through the school and the system, as well as authority on down. Thus they are responsible to the school leader, but they are also managers, in that they are responsible for those underneath them.

After learning the APs' roles, the facilitator summarized the information and created a diagram of their relationships to one another, saying: "You all need each other, and in needing each other you need to understand what the other does." If one is absent, can the others fill in? When a teacher is out, a substitute is hired; when an AP is out, the tasks must be picked up by the other APs. The facilitator recommended that they write up their job descriptions, so that when turnover occurs, a new AP could see the different areas of the job. If there are no realistic job descriptions, then there is no real accountability.

In a few schools, because Civic Strategies staff became so knowledgeable about the capabilities of the individual APs as well as the job descriptions of the various AP positions, Civic Strategies made recommendations that particular staff members switch positions, or seek other positions. Thus Civic Strategies became deeply involved in the professional and personal success of some of the school's staff; this follows Civic Strategies' philosophy that if the adults in a school are satisfied with their lives and work, the students are more likely to be satisfied, as well.

Policies and Procedures

One Civic Strategies staff person is fond of saying to the APs that: "If it's in somebody's head, it's wrong. It should be on paper." S/he means that, for consistency in a school, it is important to have policies and procedures written down. Hence another exercise carried out with APs is to have them list policies in their department, and whether they are formalized. This exercise is a useful tool in first demonstrating the existing confusion regarding policies and procedures, and then in helping APs to work as a team to define them.

For example, at one meeting with a cabinet that had been receiving a lot of assistance, the Civic Strategies facilitator suggested to the APs that they create a policy manual, listing the policies of the school. An AP said that they already have departmental handbooks, which elicited surprise from most of the others – Really? We do? At another school, when the facilitator asked an AP to list the policies in his area, he said that there was not one policy he was aware of. Yet of course he had policies; he simply was not used to thinking of them as such.

At one school, APs complained about directives sent from the Board of Education. For example, the [former] chancellor had decreed that students could not wear hats in school, but they never saw a written policy. The Civic Strategies staff person explained why they needed consistency: "If a teacher has a problem with a student with a hat, and goes to an AP, that teacher should get the same answer from every AP. Otherwise, everybody is making up their own rules, and it looks bad."

Regarding procedures, as the cabinets began to set goals, Civic Strategies staff always asked if there were procedures for accomplishing them. For example, one cabinet set a goal of better coordinating testing; the facilitator asked if such a procedure were written down anywhere already, and the answer was no. The facilitator also worked with APs on some of their individual responsibilities; for example, one wanted to work out a better system for ordering supplies for her department so that she would not wait until the last minute as she did every year. The facilitator emphasized that there should be a central place where newcomers and existing school staff could refer to the school's policies and procedures.

Principal and Cabinet Relationships

Civic Strategies found that the principals and their cabinets usually needed to clarify their expectations of each other. In more than one school, there was mistrust between a relatively new principal and the APs. Some cabinets felt dictated to by the principals. Principals who acknowledged that they "dictated" argued that their cabinets were too weak for independent action. APs were also upset that teachers took problems directly to the principal, which they felt undermined their own authority. As a tool towards improving the relationship between the cabinet and the principal, the Civic Strategies facilitators asked each to list what they wanted from the other, and what they agreed to give to the other. Then the facilitator worked with both sides.

Example

> ***In one school, the APs asked that the principal direct staff with problems to the appropriate AP; they also asked that the principal respect confidentiality, hold private conversations private, and so on. The APs said that, in return, they would be respectful of the principal's conversations, they would meet their deadlines, they would be loyal to the principal, and so on. At regular intervals these lists were re-visited, with the facilitator asking the APs and principal if all were sticking to their promises. In this school, however, the different parties tended to argue that they were keeping to their agreements, while the other side was not. The APs saw Civic Strategies' job as helping the principal work with them, while the principal felt that Civic Strategies' objective was primarily to help the APs develop as managers.***

Some APs argued that their relationships with their principal had actually become worse since the work with Civic Strategies had begun. They wondered if the process of airing grievances had made everyone more sensitive. Civic Strategies responded that "Change is never comfortable" and that it is positive that they're addressing their pre-existing problems. In general, most participants felt that more time was needed to work out these problems. And some reported that Civic Strategies was helping them to focus less on personality conflicts and more on the work at hand. It is too soon to know how all of these events will play out, but thus far, it appears as if progress is being made.

Example: Assistant Principal Professional Development in the Bronx

> *To kick off AP work in their schools, the four participating Bronx principals pooled their resources and held a joint Saturday retreat. The agenda, created by the principals and Civic Strategies, was two-fold: an introduction to the goal of building up the cabinets, and then working as a cabinet on project-based learning (more on the latter below). That the principals initiated this plan indicates that they had developed a positive working relationship with Civic Strategies.*
>
> *The first retreat was such a success that the APs requested a second one, after which a third included selected teachers in planning interdisciplinary projects for their students. The principals insisted that the retreats be held in a professional environment, an upscale corporate conference center in a beautiful wooded setting, and this decision contributed to the success of the retreats. Participants, accustomed to lean school budgets, expressed great appreciation at their surroundings and at being treated as professionals.*
>
> *The retreats focused on the roles of the cabinet members and of the cabinet as a team. For some of the exercises, the principals worked with their team; at other times, the principals left to hold their own planning sessions with Civic Strategies staff, while their APs worked together. Civic Strategies staff pointed out that the schools have annual budgets of several million dollars and so should learn to operate more like small businesses. Cabinet members should engage in strategic planning, rather than managing by reacting to day-to-day occurrences. There was some resistance, with participants claiming that they cannot plan because they have to constantly respond to last minute demands from their principal, superintendent, or central administration. Civic Strategies acknowledged this problem and responded that it would be addressed. Still, Civic Strategies emphasized that behavioral change was necessary: participants*

could continue their current ways of functioning, or could try new ways that would more likely lead to their own and their students' success.

This work did not end with the final retreat. In two of the Bronx schools, these retreats were followed by intensive group and individual AP sessions. In these and other schools, several areas were covered: school and AP goals, principal and cabinet relationships, AP roles and responsibilities, and school policies and procedures.

Structural Barriers to Change

Through the work with the APs, many barriers to change were brought to light. For example, uncertainty over the schools' funding prevented progress in some cases. One cabinet wanted to systematize an annual procedure for ordering and purchasing textbooks, but could not do so because they never know when the funds will be made available.

The most frequently-cited barrier was a lack of time. When Civic Strategies staff spoke of better time management, APs typically countered that they cannot plan their time, because there are always "emergencies" – last minute requests and directives from the Board of Education and superintendents. Many APs were emotional about this problem. One said, "I am stressed out. The pile gets higher and higher, and nobody takes anything out from the bottom." S/he wants to observe and help teachers, but that is now the smallest part of the job. In another school, an AP tearfully said, "There's just not enough help, I feel naked." Moreover, it seemed to some that the work with Civic Strategies was demanding of their precious hours, taking time away from other needed activities. At one meeting, an AP said to the facilitator, "We can't do the job in the time allotted – you yourself said this – but you're adding more to the job." S/he replied, "No, I'm not asking you to *do* more, just be *aware* of the other things going on."

From Civic Strategies' point of view, lack of time is not a problem in itself, but a severe symptom of deeper problems such as unclear lines of responsibility and unproductive communication and reporting relationships within and beyond the schools. Civic Strategies validated the APs' feelings of being overburdened and assured them of their efforts with principals and superintendents to try to reduce paperwork and last minute

demands. This helped Civic Strategies to gain support from the APs and commitment to the change effort.

Another barrier to change was the fact that several of these schools were in transition, with APs, teachers and staff not knowing if their principal would be returning the following year, or even if their school would still be open. At one such school, the APs felt demoralized because they were being told to implement a school restructuring plan that contained little of their input. A principal asked how s/he could be an effective leader since his/her position was uncertain. These situations of course had an effect on morale and performance, as well as on the potential impact of Civic Strategies activities. At times Civic Strategies was unsure whether to devote further resources to an individual who might be leaving or a school that might be closing. Civic Strategies made efforts to stay ahead of the constant upheaval within the system through their increasingly close relationships with superintendents and union officials.

Characterization of AP and Cabinet Sessions and Results

The cabinet sessions observed for this report were all intense and spirited. All participants interviewed spoke highly of the Civic Strategies staff, calling them "wonderful facilitators" and "straightforward" (the latter being particularly important to these mistrustful individuals). The Civic Strategies staff have generally been seen as being adept at defusing hostility. One AP saw Civic Strategies staff as trainers: "People are never trained to be APs although they do train people to be principals. S/he is training us to be APs." The staff are so effective in this role that most participants do not recognize any particular model to their work; instead they tend to extol Civic Strategies staff for their personalities.

APs report that due to the work with Civic Strategies they have become able to meet and solve problems on their own, without the principal, and principals are grateful for this progress as well. One AP said that the Civic Strategies facilitator "has helped us to move forward with the cabinet, and helped us to define our own expectations of the principal while clarifying her expectations of us. Before Civic Strategies, no one had clear

expectations of anyone and so it was hard to perform as an AP. We are not 100 percent there yet, but there has been lots of progress."

While previously APs felt that they were "working in a vacuum," in their new meetings without the principal they keep up on one another's departments. As one of them put it, the Civic Strategies staff person most closely involved "observed how we worked together and told us she saw disjointedness and she felt we were working in isolation. She has worked with us to make us a unit and not separate parts. I am in agreement with the diagnosis and the treatment. We are one school and we need to learn to think more like we are all part of one school."

Participants also feel that time management and communication skills have improved. Civic Strategies developed simple management tools for use by principals and cabinets; for example, a form on which to write down decisions made at meetings and people assigned to follow up. As another example, for an AP of guidance in one school the Civic Strategies staff person created a chart of all the requirements and responsibilities of each counselor – e.g., sending out failure letters, the end of each marking period, the senior breakfast, college applications due – so that every counselor would have his or her own time line of deadlines. The AP called this a "wonderful tool."

A strong indication of the value placed on this work is that the APs we spoke with want the work to continue. They also typically want Civic Strategies to be in their school more frequently. In the words of one of them, "If we had more of Civic Strategies' time, we could move faster, make progress faster."

Much of this work is still ongoing. Civic Strategies' model calls for their participation in a school until new, better behaviors on the part of the staff become routine. Building the APs' skills and work habits is a long-term process. The model also includes "training the trainers," meaning identifying and working one-on-one with an AP who is respected by his or her colleagues, so that when Civic Strategies disengages from the school, a leader

will remain to reinforce the new way of working. Following up on this process would be a good area for future research.

CURRICULUM ENHANCEMENT AND INTEGRATION

Summary: The work begun on curricular and instructional change is promising but still at an early stage.

New York City's and Civic Strategies' proposals for curricular and instructional change – in particular, integration of vocational and academic studies, and project-based learning (PBL) – are in line with national trends. The 1994 national school-to-work legislation supported integration and applied methodologies (such as PBL) as ways to improve the knowledge and skills of youth. Such strategies are believed to motivate and teach students better than traditional pedagogies because they are "learner-centered" and "authentic" (Bailey and Merritt, 1997). A recent review of the research on PBL concluded that while PBL is relatively challenging to plan and enact, teachers and students find it beneficial and effective; and some studies find that it produces gains in academic achievement as measured by standardized tests (Thomas, 2000).

The New York City vocational high schools mirror others around the country in that they are just beginning efforts towards integration and authentic instructional strategies. The traditional departmental structure of high schools mitigates against integration of subject matter. Civic Strategies' school assessments typically found that the vocational and academic sides of the schools "rarely talk," a problem common to vocational and even comprehensive high schools (Little, 1993; 1995). Another common problem is the widespread perception that vocational curricula are on a lower intellectual level than academic curricula (Little, 1993). With a renewed emphasis on academic achievement, vocational teachers feel more than ever the necessity of defending the rigor and importance of their programs. During an assessment of one school, a vocational teacher said of his program: "Academic teachers don't get it, they think it's for dumb kids." Yet

the focus on academics had some vocational teachers concerned about their own abilities to raise the level of academic, as opposed to occupational, content in their courses. Other teachers saw the potential of new integrated and project-based instructional strategies, but said time was lacking for the preparation and planning needed.

Civic Strategies is assisting the schools with many curricular and instructional initiatives; however, due to Civic Strategies' initial focus on school leadership and management, at the time of our research, only a few of these initiatives had progressed very far. Examples will be described below. In one school, Civic Strategies helped a principal create a strategic plan for restructuring his/her school's vocational programming as a whole, and then worked to integrate vocational and academic content in two specific programs. For the four Bronx schools, Civic Strategies organized Saturday retreats to introduce PBL strategies to APs and then to teachers. Civic Strategies then helped several groups of those teachers implement pilot interdisciplinary projects, with the intention of subsequently broadening the circle of participating teachers.

Program Restructuring and Curriculum Integration

One principal credits Civic Strategies with helping her to envision and implement "major, systemic change." The principal and Civic Strategies staff created a restructuring plan for the school and its vocational programs, based on a strategic planning process of five phases: examining current curricular offerings, developing a plan, implementing the program, evaluating student performance, and then reviewing the program based on the evaluation findings. The advantage of this model was that it could first be applied to the school's offerings as a whole, and then be used to restructure specific vocational programs. In addition, following such a model requires documentation, in line with Civic Strategies' exhortation that, if it's not written down, it's not real.

It was decided that the school would reform its vocational programming to offer five different concentrations. The principal and Civic Strategies staff also thought out the business connections, academic standards, technological applications, and guidance

components that would support the concentrations. Work began first on folding three small programs in carpentry, electrical, and plumbing into one large construction trades program. Students would cover the different areas within the larger program, meaning they would be exposed to all aspects of the building trades industry. During the summer of 1999, a Civic Strategies staff member met with the program's teacher and with academic teachers (English and social studies) to enhance the academics of the program. They identified books geared to the vocational subject and that could be taught in the vocational classroom, to incorporate more reading in the program. They also created research projects for the students.

The construction trades teacher thoroughly appreciated the time spent with Civic Strategies. He had his own ideas for the new program but found that the Civic Strategies facilitator helped him organize his ideas and access new information he needed. S/he never imposed anything on him, the teacher said; instead, s/he "was like an orchestra leader, directing." There was praise all around for this process, but some momentum was lost when this Civic Strategies staff person left the project in the fall of 1999. Still, the new program was implemented on-schedule in the 1999-2000 school year.

The principal sees the new construction program as a model that can be replicated. In the spring of 2000, Civic Strategies began to work with the school on restructuring a second program. Initial meetings were held at which the teachers involved toured a similar program at another school, and reviewed the existing program and curriculum. Then they began discussions towards piloting a new interdisciplinary course that would serve to introduce students to the program.

This effort has moved very slowly because of several challenges. While the teachers have ideas, they and Civic Strategies staff were unable to coordinate the necessary meeting time. At two meetings observed for this report, the available time was much reduced by the late arrival of participants. At the second meeting a crucial participant was absent. At both meetings, the bulk of the time was spent discussing the teachers' lack of time. One teacher spends his planning period doing free production work for the borough's

superintendency. He expressed that, even though this work takes away from his teaching, he cannot say no because he is ensured adequate equipment in return. The vocational AP empathized with the teacher and told Civic Strategies staff that they could not expect his participation, while at the same time the principal was exerting pressure on the teacher to be involved.

As the school year drew to a close, the commitment to restructuring this program seemed in place, yet little actual progress had been made. The Civic Strategies facilitator suggested that the group meet over the summer, and the teachers initially agreed to do so but later backed out. One teacher said that s/he had no time during the summer, because "I go back into my field." Thus while initially the hope was to begin to implement a second new program in the fall of 2000, the second effort has not yet made headway. Nevertheless, in a follow-up conversation with the principal of this school, s/he gave credit to Civic Strategies for helping her turn her school around. The construction program was recently featured as a model career and technical education program in a public television special hosted by the New York State Education Commissioner.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) Initiatives

Civic Strategies elected to pilot PBL in the vocational schools not only because of its benefits for students, but also as a means of creating school-based working teams to focus on the process of changing instructional practice. Civic Strategies carried out PBL instruction and planning sessions with groups of staff from schools in two boroughs. The most successful efforts were those with the four Bronx schools, who participated in offsite Saturday workshops and later follow-up meetings. At the workshops, a PBL expert recruited by Civic Strategies introduced the value of PBL as creating a culture of inquiry, adding relevance, and supporting standards, and then led the participants through the elements of good PBL. The facilitator explained different methods for creating projects. He then had the participants, who were sitting at tables according to their schools, create a project supporting the New York State standard "demonstrate writing ability with a thematic essay."

These exercises spurred some good cross-discipline discussions among the APs and the teachers. At one table, the AP of the automotive program and the English AP sparred over whether all students should read Shakespeare; if the students can and want to read car manuals, should the teachers care, as long as they are reading? The automotive AP had already been trying to convince his teachers to include more reading and writing in their shop classes, but they were resistant. He suggested that having people from industry explain to the teachers why students need better skills would be more convincing. One problem, however, is that some of the automotive teachers, if they were to give more writing assignments, would have difficulty grading them; yet the English teachers would not want additional grading burdens. All participants agreed that making the time to create new assignments as well as new assessments was a big problem.

At the teacher retreat, the teachers also raised barriers to implementing PBL: the lack of available time to meet with other teachers, as well as the classroom time required by projects themselves; the lack of money needed to buy materials for projects; the need for double periods for projects; the problem that erratic student attendance has for continuity of projects; the problem of grading individuals who have worked on group projects. All of these issues were aired with the principals present, so that they could understand the structural barriers to change their teachers face. The principals addressed some of their concerns; for example one principal said that she would make strong efforts to help teachers find common planning time. Interdisciplinary groups of teachers then began to design actual projects that they could implement back in their schools.

Example

> *One group planned to upgrade an existing project for cosmetology students: creating a plan and model for a salon. The senior cosmetology project would be more rigorous in that the models would have to be built to scale, with assistance from a math teacher; the projects would be done in groups; and the students would turn in portfolios that would include a business plan, cost estimate, description of a preferred location, human resources plan, blueprint-like drawing of the salon layout, and logs or journals of the time spent creating the models. All of the written components would be graded for grammar and spelling.*

To pull this together, the cosmetology teachers worked with an English teacher and a math teacher. The students also used a science lab to create their models, and a computer lab for their written work. All of the participating teachers agreed that the projects demanded more from the students than in previous years, and while at first the students complained and doubted their own ability to complete the project, in the end they rose to the challenge. One teacher said that the students were amazed that they could actually do everything that was asked of them.

The teachers felt the project was a success but also felt they needed more planning time. There was some tension between the teachers who had attended the Saturday retreat and those who had not; the latter felt left out and less-prepared. One teacher said that the project took time from the seniors' preparation for the state cosmetology examination, which they needed to pass in order to find employment in the field. The teachers also wanted more frequent, on-site support from Civic Strategies. Yet Civic Strategies staff expected that the project would be supervised on a daily basis by the teachers' AP, who had attended the three retreats. Yet s/he did not do so, indicating that s/he needed assistance in defining his/her role regarding the project. Civic Strategies stepped back in to guide him/her, and the project.

This particular example demonstrates that there are sometimes divergent expectations regarding the involvement of Civic Strategies. For their part, Civic Strategies staff work to impart the necessary skills to the school personnel, and design and instigate projects that will allow the school staff to practice their new skills. Civic Strategies' goal is to develop the capacity of the staff to carry out change and new initiatives themselves, rather than developing a dependency on outside consultants such as Civic Strategies. At what point in this process Civic Strategies can begin to withdraw and expect school staff to carry the initiative on their own is a tricky matter, and specific to every particular context. In a few cases, the disengagement of Civic Strategies was seen as a lack of support by teachers.

The project described above was, at the end of the school year, seen as a success by the participants. Project-based learning served as a way to connect AP development work with instructional improvement. The result of this pilot project is that the principal has instituted mandatory interdisciplinary senior projects in every occupational program. To support this, the principal will try to build in common planning time for the teachers

implementing PBL, and help APs to establish new guidelines for evaluating the teachers that are using these new instructional methods.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This report has described the Civic Strategies model for school improvement in the New York City vocational high schools, summarized the efforts to implement the model, and focused upon the Civic Strategies activities in several schools. It is clear that Civic Strategies staff have put in a great deal of time and have engaged in a wide range of activities. While again, this report should not be taken as a strict evaluation of the initiative, it is instructive to attempt to specify what has been achieved to date, and what are the prospects for the future. In particular, lessons may be learned from the variation in the extent to which the Civic Strategies model took hold across the twenty high schools.

As noted earlier in this report, we find that the Civic Strategy model is logical, and consistent with the principles that are widely accepted as being sound in the current school reform literature. The model emphasizes the tailoring of interventions for specific schools, rather than employing a pre-fabricated design, and as such, should be applicable to any school. The model most certainly has the potential to create change.

The model was also well-implemented, given the budget and the challenging conditions found in the schools. Where buy-in was successful, Civic Strategies was able to roll out the rest of the model and make progress towards positive changes. As stated above, we estimate that this occurred in two-thirds of the schools. At the other one-third, implementation became stuck at the buy-in stage (for reasons we will discuss further below).

Implementation of the model has resulted in a variety of changes that appear to have created momentum in the right direction. A number of patterns do seem to be emerging from the mosaic of activities across the system and the schools over two years:

- In the system as a whole, the initiative has had a positive effect in energizing people to focus on the dire necessity of improving the vocational schools. The Civic Strategies model is also helping many in the system to think about and understand the connections between leadership and management development on the one hand and classroom instruction and student achievement on the other.
- Collaboration across the system among central officials, superintendents, principals, and union officials has increased by way of venues such as task forces developed and facilitated by Civic Strategies. Some principals are newly engaged with and learning from one another, as is illustrated by the Bronx consortium of four vocational high schools.
- Many school-based managers (principals and assistant principals) have received extensive coaching on management approaches and have adopted more effective day-to-day and long-term managerial practices. One result is that communication and collaboration among school-based managers and between these managers and the instructional staff has improved.
- A number of school-based managers are initiating significant changes in their curricula in order to bring their offerings in line with the expressed needs of business and industry as well as with the priorities articulated by the New York State and City Board of Education. More academic and vocational teachers are working with one another and some have already made some programs and coursework more rigorous through interdisciplinary project-based learning strategies. These activities are still underway.

In bringing about these accomplishments, Civic Strategies staff have become colleagues of many of the superintendents and principals. Civic Strategies staff now work as partners within the school system, planning and coordinating activities at the borough level as well as at the school-level.

Thus the Civic Strategies changes have clearly taken hold in a number of the participating vocational high schools and they appear to be leading to deep-seated changes in the ways

that the schools plan and conduct their business. As Civic Strategies continues to work with these schools, they are attempting to measure progress and then will plan how to slowly disengage. Civic Strategies has, in collaboration with the superintendents, developed rubrics with which to measure progress in the schools. These rubrics are already serving as useful tools in deciding where to target activities and when the efforts are demonstrating an impact.

The changes promoted by Civic Strategies can be linked to expected improvements in student performance in terms of a logical sequence of steps. At the time that we completed our fieldwork, from our observations, in most of the schools these changes had not yet penetrated down into changes in instruction in a large enough proportion of the classrooms to justify a belief that they were *already* leading to changes in student outcomes. Moreover, it would be difficult to directly attribute any future improvements in student achievement to the work of Civic Strategies with 100 percent confidence, given the number and variety of other initiatives in these schools (e.g., new career academies, new virtual enterprises, Ventures in Education). However, at least one superintendent directly attributes improvements in Regents passing rates, attendance, and graduation rates in two schools to Civic Strategies work.

As we have described, there are enough examples of momentum being created after Civic Strategies has come into a school to lead us to believe that the past two years have clearly demonstrated the potential for this kind of approach to begin to make a difference and that it is likely to become a significant contributor to future improvements that will emerge over time.

This report focused primarily on describing activities in those schools in which the model was implemented the most successfully, and it has shown that the approach *can* work in many school settings. However, there were schools in which the model did not take root. In some of them, the buy-in phase was never successful, even after months of contact between the school and Civic Strategies. The resources expended in several schools were

said to have been a waste of money by some borough administrators; they and Civic Strategies mutually agreed to cease efforts in those schools.

What factors differentiate the two types of schools? Our contacts with school leaders and faculty at both kinds of schools have led us to conclude that at least two factors must be in place if one can realistically hope to initiate meaningful, deep changes in school operations. The two factors are "readiness" and "intensity." "Readiness" refers to an openness to new ways of thinking and acting. If the principal and/or other key managers do not have this kind of openness, it is doubtful whether the Civic Strategies model (or any other fundamental change model) is likely to bear fruit – at least as long as the same officials are in place.

On the most basic level, in our opinion (and in Civic Strategies' staff's opinion), success or failure depended to a large extent on the individual principals' willingness to participate in the initiative. From Civic Strategies' perspective, some principals were uncooperative; they cancelled appointments, refused to admit their problems, and so on. However, from the point of view of some of the principals and superintendents, readiness was difficult because of the character of this particular project. Educators are accustomed to packaged interventions, they usually can gain a sense of what they are supposed to be ready *for*. In this case it was difficult for some of them to understand the potential of what Civic Strategies was offering. They may have been less than cooperative because they did not understand what Civic Strategies could actually *do* for them. Civic Strategies, however, can identify several points early on in the initiative when they and the individual principals discussed and pinpointed the specific areas of work that would be addressed. Civic Strategies believes the goals of the initiative, and their own role in it, were clear.

Secondly, radical attitude, behavior, and skill shifts cannot be accomplished with only sporadic input. While we cannot specify exactly how much effort is needed, it does seem clear that the answer is "substantial." The major implementation issue that arose in our research is intensity: what is the critical mass of staff support that is required to bring

about the kinds of transformations that Civic Strategies and the New York City Board of Education have promoted in these large urban high schools? In retrospect, Civic Strategies may have had a staffing level inadequate to support deep changes in *all* of the city's vocational schools. And we feel that ideally, more teachers should have been involved in the initiative.

The two factors seem to interact. School-based managers requested more and more Civic Strategies input in places where things seemed to be going well, with the growing progress feeding growing readiness, which in turn feeds more requests for Civic Strategies staff time (intensity). In those schools in which the Civic Strategies approaches were taking root, the feedback was generally positive, with one exception – the schools felt they weren't getting enough of Civic Strategies' time. The charge of Civic Strategies being spread too thin was heard from both the schools where progress was and was not being made. One principal commented that for his one-twentieth of the total grant amount, he could have hired an expert to work on-site at his school half-time. Even some Civic Strategies' staff felt that the number of schools that they were responsible for was too high. Unfortunately, it was a given that all the vocational schools should receive services in the two years of the grant.

The influence of the superintendencies is also likely a factor in explaining variations in "readiness." Most agree that where the borough superintendent took an active interest in the initiative, those schools participated more fully. Where superintendents did not embrace the initiative, progress was stalled. The relationships between the superintendents and their principals are important, as to whether the superintendent allows the principal to admit problems and ask for help, or whether the superintendent plays what is perceived as a "gotcha" game in seeking to blame and punish principals for their school's failings, keeping in mind that there is much deep-seated distrust within the New York City school system. Superintendents also have influence over the effort in that they can use the carrot or the stick in moving their principals towards cooperating with Civic Strategies, thereby influencing "readiness." As one interviewee said, the superintendents should know their schools, and they should know how to make it work.

Yet the superintendents themselves had to go through their own buy-in process, as the Civic Strategies effort was foisted on them by central officials.

In some ways, the process of Civic Strategies attempting to get buy-in resembled the classic "chicken and egg" conundrum. While the Civic Strategies model calls for buy-in as a pre-condition for change-making activities, some administrators and educators were in effect saying, show me what you can do and if it's good, then I'll work with you. They wanted something in their hands that could help them address their immediate challenge: prepare students to pass exit examinations. Several individuals said that, after two years, they still had not seen nor did they understand what Civic Strategies could actually *do* for them; there had been a lot of *talking*, but not much concrete *doing*. After all, Civic Strategies was a group new to New York City; none of the schools knew their reputation or capabilities. Yet from the perspective of Civic Strategies, these schools never became ready to do more; the schools' argument that the role of Civic Strategies was never clear is actually a way to avoid confronting their problems and implementing change.

Only as visible activities finally got underway in a few of the resisting schools did participants come around to supporting Civic Strategies. Thus, in a reversal of the model, identifying a need in the school that Civic Strategies could address successfully was in some cases a pre-condition to buy-in. Indeed, with regard to professional development, some researchers have found that changes in attitudes and beliefs may only occur *after* new strategies are implemented and results are evident (Phlegar and Kaufman, 1992). Civic Strategies' staff began to learn this lesson; in the last months of the second year of the initiative the staff made final efforts to find ways to achieve something in the schools where no progress had yet been made. In a few instances initially uncooperative schools did finally become engaged.

There are different opinions on the question of who is responsible for making a school "ready" for change. Some hold that overcoming resistance was part of Civic Strategies' job, while others hold that the principals should be held accountable for meeting them at least half-way. As noted, the superintendents appear to play a key role in this realm.

Finally, readiness did not appear to be consistently related to a school's neediness; Civic Strategies had some significant successes in some of the most challenged schools, but some of those schools also strongly fended off Civic Strategies' advances.

Looking to the Future

How applicable is this model for other schools in New York and for other settings? The Civic Strategies model; needs assessment and buy-in, development of school-specific improvement plans, and delivery of tailored professional development activities; is not specific to vocational schools. The model can potentially be applied to other schools in New York City and elsewhere.

As our fieldwork drew to a close, Civic Strategies was in discussions with superintendents about continuing work in some of the schools and beginning new work in additional schools. When the third year of the initiative began in the fall of 2000, four of six superintendencies wished to carry on working with Civic Strategies. Because of the decentralization of the city school system and its funding, it is no longer an imperative for Civic Strategies to work with *all* the vocational schools. Superintendents can contract with Civic Strategies to work in individual schools, as they and the schools wish.
In one case where the superintendent chose not to further engage Civic Strategies, Civic Strategies has used private funding to extend their services to an individual school that needs and wants their continued assistance.

Thus in the future, Civic Strategies will attempt to make a judgment as to the fit between their model of school improvement and the perspective of a school's leader, and then mutually decide if a collaboration should begin. Civic Strategies staff expect that planning the work in this way will decrease the amount of time and resources spent in the buy-in process. In the needs assessment phase, they hope to gain an immediate sense of the potential for progress in a school and discuss this with the superintendent before engaging further.

This is a realistic strategy. But it has sad overtones. Part of the promise of the Civic Strategies model was its potential applicability to every school, because of the emphasis on tailoring services. Yet practically, it makes more sense to focus future efforts and resources on those schools that are open to the deep managerial changes that Civic Strategies specializes in, at least in the short run.

Hence we recommend that, for future interventions efforts such as this one, sufficient resources be invested in a concentrated manner in those schools that are ready. Once results are seen, those efforts can be used as models to attract other schools to participate. There is a great deal of word-of-mouth throughout the school system; principals hear about successful new technology academies, virtual enterprise programs, and the like, and want them in their schools. While these are packaged programs quite different from what Civic Strategies offers, it is not unrealistic to think that school personnel would not spread the word about Civic Strategies' work in the same way.

But there may be continuing difficulties in describing what Civic Strategies does. We have attempted to do so above, and it has taken many long pages. The name of the organization, Civic Strategies, does not give a good indication. The staff do not like to be referred to as consultants, nor are they simply facilitators, as we have sometimes referred to them. Some have half-joked that the Civic Strategies model resembles a 12-step program for schools, because they have to start by admitting their problems. One could also describe Civic Strategies in business terms, as carrying out organizational development, human resource recovery, or professional re-orientation. None of these terms gives a sense of the warm relationships that have grown between the staff and those in the City's educational system, nor of the dedication the Civic Strategies staff have given to this project. We believe that Civic Strategies is on to something, and that with further efforts to refine the approach and document its success, the picture will become clearer.

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ENDNOTES

[i] Each PDA is equal to approximately four hours of work including preparation time, on-site support and training, and follow-up. This figure is Civic Strategies' count of services delivered specifically to the schools from September 1998 through the end of March 2001. Additional PDAs were delivered in other, non-school-specific areas such as planning with Board of Education Officials, project management, and so on.

[ii] The initial number of schools was 19; a twentieth one was added early on, and a twenty-first in the second year.

[iii] We will use the simpler term "superintendent" to refer to both superintendents and assistant superintendents.

[iv] Occupationally specific course-taking dropped 14 percent between 1982 and 1994. On average, high school students earned 4.7 vocational credits in 1982; by 1994, that number had dropped to 4.0. Only 7 percent of all high school students in 1994 "specialized" in vocational education, taking four or more credits in a single occupational area, a decline of almost 44 percent from 1982, when 13 percent of students were vocational specialists (NCES, 2000).

[v] Between 1982 and 1994, students with disabilities increased their vocational course taking by 24 percent. During the same period, students without disabilities *decreased* their vocational course taking by 17 percent, and increased their academic course load by 23 percent.

[vi] In 1982, only 5 percent of vocational concentrators met the standards; in 1994 it was 33 percent (NCES, 2000).

[vii] The review included the ERIC database, Teachers College and Columbia library catalogs, Educational Abstracts, Lexis-Nexis and current periodical databases.

[viii] It should be recognized that efforts to upgrade vocational schools were also reported upon on occasion. For example, Park West was said to be attempting to revive its program. Aviation High School revamped its curriculum, sent 60 percent of its graduates to college, and, in 1995, received a fighter jet to train students to inspect and maintain aircraft. This addition, however, was a mixed blessing, as it took the school over two years to install the jet due to a lack of funding (Onishi, 1994; Chiang, 1995).

[ix] The policy change with regard to high school application and admissions started a complicated process, in effect currently, in which all 8th graders can submit their rank-ordered choices of school. Some schools and programs may still screen and test applicants while others must combine student selection and random assignment.

[x] We use the term "s/he" to help protect the confidentiality of the case example and participants.

[xi] In the most recent development, New York City schools' Chancellor Levy requested that the state Board of Regents change the new rules to require vocational students to pass only the English and math Regents examinations. Levy suggested that vocational students be given an assessment of their skills in the trade area they have studied. The Board of Regents declined to change the exam requirements, but did modify course requirements for vocational students so that some courses that integrate vocational studies with academics can count towards academic credits. See Zernike, 2001.

[xii] An unwritten agreement was also made that Civic Strategies and the central office would work together to raise more money for the initiative. Additional funds were raised from the Hearst, Dreyfus, and Bankers' Trust Foundations. A portion of these funds was dedicated to this report.

[xiii] Simply divided among 20 schools, this would be $25,000 per school per year.

[xiv] We did not independently verify all of the findings at the 20 schools, but through our fieldwork observed that many were on target.